Philosophy of Technology

We are entering an age where innovations in technology, as well as the number of people who have access to such tools, are growing at alarming rates. As technology becomes more accessible, as well as faster, and easier to use, the ability to use technology to enhance our classrooms is becoming an increasing reality. Incorporating technology into our classrooms is important to helping our students develop a global perspective, to enhancing student relationships with a broader audience, and to helping our students develop as individuals capable of critically and carefully navigating the Internet.

One of the most valuable aspects of technology is the ability to enhance student awareness, interest, and concern for the greater world. With the abundance of information and exploration that can be done through access to various mediums such as online international news sources, blogging, Youtube videos, and Skype, students will be able to see and learn about the world beyond the confines of the classroom. In developing a greater world perspective, teachers can help students to develop deeper empathy for people and issues beyond their immediate family, town, state, and country, to the greater world. Time for Kids, at http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/ is a wonderful website to help students learn about current event issues within their local and global community. Students can expand their understanding of classroom lessons about using videos, worksheets, quizzes, and games that are available through the website. For students who have special learning needs, the access to visual aids, such as pictures and videos can help enhance learning. Furthermore, interactive games can help kinesthetic learners or those with fine motor coordination challenges to enhance learning and developmental skills.

By bringing technology into the classroom, we can also broaden the relationships and information sources that students have access to. In *Empowering students with technology*, Alan November states, “Technology brings us the authentic opportunity to teach our students to value the perspectives of people who have a very different cultural, geographic, historical, or economic point of view” (November, 2010, p. 42). Students now have the ability to meet other students from classrooms around the world, enhancing their global perspectives. One means of providing students with a greater global perspective is through Internet Workshop, a collaborative model used between classres to interact and learn from information provided by students and teachers of corresponding classrooms. Students can learn about the types of schools that students in Brazil or Thailand attend, what activities those students enjoy participating in, what types of families and cultures those students come from, what foods those students enjoy eating, and so on. As students learn about ways in which they differ and are similar to friends around the world, they develop meaningful camaraderie in a greater community. Using technology, we can also provide our students with access to “experts” in the topics that we are studying in classes. For example, when researching lions, we could use Skype to videoconference with a zoologist. In this interaction, students have the ability to ask an expert about questions they have that go beyond the information that they could find in a research book. By encouraging our students to engage with “experts,” as teachers, we are conveying a belief in the value and capabilities of our students as inquisitive, dedicated learners.

It is critical as teachers that we incorporate technology in our classrooms in ways that insure access and participation for all students. Online learning and networking are meant to serve as a means of engaging individuals without the constraints of time and space that had limited interaction previously. Students who are novice users of technology, as well as students with special needs who have intellectual, physical, social, or emotional challenges should not be restricted from participation. Rather, it is important for teachers to engage these learners, guiding their learning, and meeting students at their level of need. Vygotsky’s theory regarding the Zone of Proximal Development, whereby students are guided from their actual level of development to a higher level of potential development, should be applied through supportive technology instruction (Goodman, 2008, p. 25). Teachers should use peer scaffolding as well, having students work in groups where an advanced student can facilitate acquisition of technology skills and knowledge to less experienced peers. Teachers should strive to individualize online activities as well, allowing students to explore learning in ways that incorporate intrinsic interests.

As students explore and enhance their awareness as global citizens, developing meaningful relationships with peers and experts alike, it is important as teachers that we also help students gain skills needed to be cautious, critical participants in using technology. Furthermore, with the expanse of information accessible on the Internet, as teachers, we must train our students to be vigilant navigators. In Will Richardson’s book titled *Blogs, wikis, podcasts*, he states “Safety is now about responsibility, appropriateness, and commonsense as well” (Richadson, 2010, p. 12). As teachers, we can provide students with skills in evaluating meta-web information to better understand the authors and organizations associated with websites. Links and references within websites also provide students with helpful tools in analyzing the agendas and biases a webpage may have, if any. As we enter into a “society of authorship,” where every individual can essentially become an author on the Internet, it is vital that as educators, we teach our students to be careful in what they choose to publish (Richardson, 2010, p. 5). Teachers should dissuade students from publishing information that is private, such as names and addresses, and to be aware that the opinions that they voice on the Internet will be accessible for all to see.

If teachers can helps students to be informed, cautious, critical navigators of the Web, then students will have a wonderful resource available to connect them to the larger world, and enhance their learning. The ability to gain global perspectives, to develop relationships without the constraints of a limited locale, and to do so as responsible and careful participants, will empower students with great opportunities for intellectual and social growth.

Works Cited

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